

NNewsline

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Daycare Partnership Eliminates Barrier to Employment

When Pinewood Park began their self-help and job training and development programs, the need for childcare to increase resident participation was evident. "Parents cannot concentrate on work or school if their children are not properly cared for," explains Joe Douglas III, executive director of Pinewood Park Trust Corporation and manager of Pinewood Park Learning Center in Lufkin, Texas. "Some residents were not able to participate in our programs because they didn't have childcare. Some had to bring their children along to classes, which was distracting for them and everyone involved," he said.

For Douglas and center staff the solution to this barrier was to provide residents with affordable and convenient childcare. And they did just that. The center contacted Child Care Management Services (CCMS), a state agency that contracts with the state of Texas to provide funding for parents who need childcare.

According to Texas law, for residents to receive CCMS assistance they must be enrolled in an educational or vocational program, or they must be employed. Moreover, the center had to prove that they were offering legitimate services, and that residents were active participants. "We established

an attendance roll where residents participating in our programs had to sign for each class. CCMS would call to verify if these individuals were indeed enrolled in our programs," says Douglas. Having met CCMS requirements, Pinewood Park Learning Center established a partnership in 1997 with Lufkin Daycare Center, a childcare facility that received CCMS funds.

"Because Pinewood Park Learning Center and Lufkin were both organized by the Angelina County Citizens Chamber of Commerce, and because we are in close proximity, it just made sense to pool our resources and partner with Lufkin to serve the residents and assist them with childcare," says Douglas. "It was a win-win situation for everyone. Our residents definitely use the services they offer."

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Rachel Lenoir, an employee of Lufkin Daycare Center, echoes Douglas' sentiments. She believes they have a successful partnership that offers residents an invaluable service. "Our presence in the community is important because we offer an essential service that is convenient for residents. They can come in or call anytime, particularly since many of them work nearby."

Lufkin offers childcare for children ages 6 weeks to 3 years and after-school care for children ages 3 to 10. "We are open from 6:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.," says Lenoir, "but most of our children arrive between 7:30 and 8 a.m. Parents pay on a sliding scale based on their income." In addition, the center is located within walking distance of most residences and a complimentary bus service provides transportation for children who live farther away.

According to Lenoir, the daycare center has 18 employees, a cafeteria, and 8 classrooms to which children are assigned by age. "The younger children, excluding the babies, are introduced to numbers, colors, and shapes. Their attention span is too short, so it's hard to get them to learn anything else."

Lenoir loves her job and has been employed at Lufkin for 14 years. She and other staff have strong, positive interaction with the children. "The children love music time with the piano—they clap their hands, bob their heads, and laugh. Also using cassette players, music is played in each room; the younger children love to watch shows like Barney and SpongeBob Square Pants, and the older kids love Rugrats."

The partnership between Pinewood Park Learning Center and Lufkin Daycare Center has been a vital

resource for helping residents eliminate one of the major barriers to job retention and educational opportunities.

According to Douglas, providing affordable childcare is an issue that

should be at the forefront, particularly in underserved communities. "At our center, we tell our residents that the secret to success is getting started. We tell them to make that first step, and we'll help them make the second and the third." And they've done just that. Through this partnership, the learning center shows that they keep their promises. They are committed to action, not talk.



In addition to assisting with daycare, Pinewood Park Learning Center is committed to improving the educational opportunities of school-aged children and enhancing their performance levels. The center operates a successful after-school program geared toward promoting academics. "Our mission is to break the cycle of dependence on public assistance so that the cycle is not repeated. By helping these kids develop a solid educational foundation, we help increase their chances of having greater earning power and ensure them a better financial future," says Douglas. The center also offers classes in computer literacy, the Internet, self-help, career development, job-skills and job-readiness training, and healthcare programs for adults. ♦

For more information on Pinewood Park Learning Center and the Lufkin Daycare Center, contact:

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Home Away From Home: Evaluating Quality Childcare

When parents choose a childcare provider, they are selecting a home away from home for their child. Therefore, parents must be convinced that their childcare provider will keep their child safe and mentally active while maintaining good hygiene practices. After identifying their needs and priorities, parents should consider the following points a checklist to measure the quality of their center-based or in-home childcare.

Physical Environment

The atmosphere should be clean, safe, comfortable, and cheerful with a variety of age-appropriate learning materials and samples of children's artwork on display. The latter shows that their efforts and creations are praised and appreciated, just as they would be in your home. Also, the facility should be licensed, have personal space for each child, and have an outdoor, fenced-in play area to which caregivers have an unobstructed view at all times. Moreover, separate areas should be designated for resting, quiet play, and active play with adequate space to accommodate all the children.

Caregivers and Teachers

The ability of staff to build relationships with parents and the capacity of staff to develop a child-centered program in a stimulating environment are indicators of quality. Providers are more effective if they have received training in child development and childcare. In addition, the staff-to-child ratio is important. Many specialists believe that infants and toddlers develop best in a small, intimate setting, whereas 3- to 5-year-olds benefit from the social and educational opportunities available in a larger group setting.

Important questions for parents to answer when evaluating caregivers include the following:

- ◆ Do they encourage children to be independent and self-sufficient?

- ◆ Are they sincerely interested in children?
- ◆ Are children greeted when they arrive?
- ◆ Are children's needs addressed quickly, even when things are busy?
- ◆ Are staff trained in CPR, first aid, and early childhood education?
- ◆ Are staff involved, or have participated, in continuing education programs?
- ◆ Are staff always ready to answer your questions?
- ◆ Will staff tell you what your child is doing every day?
- ◆ Are parents' ideas welcomed and are there ways for you to get involved?
- ◆ Do staff and children enjoy being together?
- ◆ Do staff practice positive child guidance when disciplining children?
- ◆ Do staff have eye-level communication and a respectful, friendly tone of voice when speaking with the children?
- ◆ Do staff welcome and encourage parents to drop by unannounced?
- ◆ Do you agree with the discipline practices?
- ◆ Are children comforted when needed?
- ◆ Will your child be happy with them?

Health and Nutrition

Caregivers should ensure that children are fed nutritionally balanced meals and snacks, and water should be available at all times. If possible, staff should sit with children at meal times to provide a homelike setting. In addition, there should be strict rules for dealing with sick children, and parents should be promptly notified if children are exposed to communicable diseases.

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Programs

Childcare providers should incorporate programs that offer a variety of both group and individual age-appropriate activities to meet children's physical, social, emotional, and cognitive growth needs. They should have a variety of materials and equipment available such as books, play dough, blocks, puzzles, and other tabletop toys as well as creative art materials. Also, activities should be both child initiated and teacher directed. Parents should consider the following when evaluating provider activities:

- ◆ Is there a daily balance of playtime, storytime, activity time, and naptime?

- ◆ Are the activities right for each age group?
- ◆ Are there enough toys and learning materials for the number of children?
- ◆ Are toys clean, safe, and within the children's reach?
- ◆ Does the program keep up with children's changing interests?
- ◆ Is the program licensed or regulated?

If parents consider these characteristics, their search for quality childcare should prove fruitful. ◆

Additional Resources

Federal Funding Resources for Childcare

There are a number of federal financial resources available to fund childcare programs. Public housing authorities and other program staff can suggest these resources to partners administering childcare programs or access these funds themselves.

Childcare and Development Fund

The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 eliminated federal childcare entitlements and consolidated the four major sources of federal childcare subsidies for low-income families into a single block grant to states—the Childcare and Development Fund (CCDF). Following are the federal eligibility requirements for this assistance:

- ◆ Children must be under age 13.
- ◆ Family income can be no more than 85 percent of the state median income (SMI) for families of the same size.
- ◆ The child must be living with parents or a parent who is working or attending a job training or educational program, or the child must be receiving child protective services or living with a parent and at risk of needing child protective services.

For more information on the CCDF, contact your state CCDF administrator at www.nccic.org/dirs/devfund.html.

Head Start

This is a matching grant program where grantees must contribute 20 percent of the total cost of the program. Traditionally, funding was provided directly to local agencies operating Head Start programs to provide services for economically disadvantaged preschool children on a part-day and part-year basis. More recently, Head Start grants have been given to programs that provide full-day and year-round services. For more information on Head Start programs, visit the National Head Start Association Web site (<http://www.nhsa.org>) or the Administration for Children and Families Head Start page (www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/hsb/).

Federal Temporary Assistance to Needy Families or State Maintenance of Effort Funds

These funds are potential resources for public housing authorities as they address their voucher recipients' childcare needs. Federal Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) funding can be spent directly on childcare services (although states are then obligated to implement time limits on those individuals receiving assistance), or a state may transfer up to 30 percent of its current TANF grant to either its Childcare and Development Fund or its Social Services Block Grant. For additional information, consult *Helping Families Achieve Self-Sufficiency: A Guide on Funding Sources for Children and Families through the TANF Program* at <http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/ofa/funds2.htm>.

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From Our Guest Columnist

Melissa Hughes is program coordinator for the Versailles Learning Center in New Orleans, Louisiana. In this issue she discusses her center's role as a haven for its underserved residents, particularly children and youth in grades K–12.

NNewsline: When was your center established, what programs does it offer, and what community does it serve?

Hughes: The Versailles Learning Center was established in 1996 as part of a federally sponsored HUD Neighborhood Networks initiative.

The center currently offers general equivalency diploma (GED), English as a second language (ESL), basic computer, and financial fitness classes. One computer class per week is taught in Vietnamese to accommodate our non-English-speaking residents. We also have after-school and summer youth activities, a first-time homebuyers course, and job training.

The center has an individual development account program that provides a four-to-one savings account match to be used toward education, small business development, or homeownership.

The center serves the Versailles Arms Apartment residents, of whom 80 percent are African American and 20 percent are Vietnamese immigrants. Versailles also offers services to the entire east New Orleans community for a small fee.

NNewsline: How did you become involved with the center, and what is your present position?

Hughes: I became involved in the center through a partnership with Boat People SOS, an organization serving the Vietnamese population in east New Orleans and my previous employer. I loved working with the center so much that I took a position as its program coordinator.

NNewsline: What comes to your mind when you hear the terms “childcare” and “daycare”?

Hughes: I think of a safe environment that offers age-appropriate learning activities for young children.

NNewsline: Do you presently have a childcare or daycare program?

Hughes: Ours is a summer camp that serves grades K–8 and a youth program that serves grades K–12. Youth in grades eight and higher are welcome in summer camp, but they must work as camp counselors. During camp, the children participate in two sessions: a program called *hidden academics* from 9 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. and an afternoon program called *recreational enrichment and cultural activities*. They are served lunch from 12:30 to 1:00 p.m. Participants are charged \$12 a week for just the morning session and \$24 a week for both sessions. Summer camp begins the Monday after summer break begins and ends the Friday before school reopens in the fall.

The summer camp and youth program strives to offer participants academic, recreational, enrichment, and cultural activities during hours when they would normally be “hanging out” on the streets. Moreover, the center’s after-school program has extended computer lab hours to encourage youth to come into the center during hours that are prime for youth crime.

NNewsline: How did you develop such a program?

Hughes: We listened to the youth. Then we gave them what they needed disguised as what they wanted. Also, we listened to the families. I cannot stress how important resident surveys are in developing programs.

NNewsline: Why is it important to have such programs for Neighborhood Networks centers?

Hughes: Centers are located in economically disadvantaged communities. HUD housing should be a temporary solution, and residents should be offered the tools needed to get them out of Section 8 and into

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regular housing or, ideally, a home of their own. Given access to education, employment training, and the resources to homeownership, residents will have the confidence needed to break the cycle of financial dependence all too often passed down to their children. We work with the youth to show them the world outside of Section 8, to teach them that good jobs are attainable, and to show them the relationship between school and work success.

When I first came on board, I asked a couple of our students what they wanted to be when they grew up. Sadly, the response was “It don’t matter. People up in here mostly don’t live to be past 18, or they go to jail.” Now these same students are beginning to see that college is a possibility. There is nothing else for the residents where our center is located. Without the center, the youth spend their time hanging out on the streets and become targets for gang and drug recruitment. Their families don’t have easily accessible tools to better themselves. Here [at the center] there is no need for transportation and few excuses for not attending classes and events.

NNewsline: What advice would you give to centers that are considering starting such a program?

Hughes: Survey the community, especially the youth. If you are not offering activities they want,

they will not stay around for very long. Also, disguise learning with fun activities. Students do not want programs that feel like an extension of the school day, nor do they want to feel they are attending another school in the summer. Think of the youth, the family, and the community as a whole, and develop programs that foster each.

If parents do not have education, they will have little interest in encouraging their children to obtain one. In underdeveloped communities, the parents have often had negative educational experiences, which get passed on to their children. The center is developed for the community and should be a welcoming place for all members of the community. This involves actually going out in the community and talking with residents face to face to let them know the center is there for them, then listening to the feedback and planning programs accordingly.

Partner, partner, partner. The greater the number of solid partnerships a center forms, the more it can offer to the entire community, and the better the chances are for funding. Community organizations tend to become competitive unless they partner to enhance communications and program resources. ♦

Additional Resources *(continued from page 4)*

Department of Labor Welfare-to-Work Grants

These grants (both formula and competitive) can be used to provide childcare assistance to welfare (TANF) recipients. For more information visit the Department of Labor’s Welfare-to-Work page (<http://wtw.doleta.gov>).

Child and Adult Care Food Program

Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) is a federal program that provides healthy meals and snacks to children and adults receiving daycare. CACFP is administered by the

U.S. Department of Agriculture and reimburses eligible providers for their meal costs. Those eligible for CACFP funds include daycare centers, family and group daycare homes, Head Start programs, and daycare services for children with disabilities. Children ages 12 and younger are eligible to receive up to two meals and one snack each day at a daycare home or center through CACFP. After-school care snacks are available to children through age 18. For more information, visit the Department of Agriculture’s CACFP page at (<http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Care/CACFP/cacfpfaqs.htm>).

Exploring Childcare Programs

Childcare is a powerful influence on children's growth and development and affects their future. Before selecting a childcare provider, parents should explore the various types available—center-based programs, family childcare, or in-home childcare—and evaluate how each one best suits their child's needs. As parents explore each type of program, they compare the caregiver and environment against what they feel is the best situation for their child. Following are some of the advantages and disadvantages of three types of childcare programs.

Center-Based Childcare

This type of care is provided in a facility other than a private home and may offer care for infants, toddlers, preschoolers, and school-age children. Fees vary, and some centers offer a sliding-fee scale or scholarship to low-income families. Centers that provide care for more than three children for longer than 3 hours a day must be licensed by the State Department of Human Services. In addition, they must follow certain standards for health and safety as well as adhere to requirements for staffing and educational programs.

Advantages

- ◆ Provides a structured program in a licensed environment.
- ◆ Exposes the child to a diverse group of children and providers.
- ◆ Is easier to schedule part-time care.
- ◆ Allows flexibility for when a provider becomes ill (substitutes are called in so that there is no need to find backup care).

Disadvantages

- ◆ May lead to more illnesses (exposure to more children).
- ◆ May not offer a consistent primary provider.
- ◆ May offer less individual attention.

Family Childcare

This type of care is provided in another caregiver's home. Although most family childcare providers accept children ranging in age from infancy to school age, some care for only one specific age group. The care may be provided in a relaxed, nurturing, home-like atmosphere, or it may be in a more structured, educational setting. Your choice of setting depends on your and your child's needs.

When family childcare providers care for more than one family's children, they must be licensed through the State Department of Human Services. Depending on the number of caregivers and/or aides, family childcare facilities may care for between 10 and 14 children, including the provider's own children. Only a certain number of these children can be younger than school age.

Advantages

- ◆ Provides home environment and playmates of varying ages.
- ◆ Offers exposure to a smaller number of children and, therefore, less exposure to illness.
- ◆ May offer more individualized nurturing care.
- ◆ May offer flexible hours.

Disadvantages

- ◆ Not many family childcare homes are licensed.
- ◆ Difficult to monitor quality of care.
- ◆ Requires a good backup plan if provider becomes ill.

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In-Home Care

A third option is an adult caregiver (sometimes a relative) caring for your child in your own home. You must pay the caregiver minimum wage and provide certain benefits if they work more than 20 hours per week. This option may be too expensive for a family with fewer than three children. You may locate this type of care through a placement agency or hire someone on your own.

Advantages

- ◆ Provides one-on-one care that may be more nurturing.
- ◆ Easier than transporting a child to and from a facility.
- ◆ Child stays in comfortable, familiar home environment.
- ◆ Less exposure to illness.

Disadvantages

- ◆ Need strong backup plan when provider is ill.
- ◆ Less social stimulation for child.
- ◆ Usually the most expensive option.
- ◆ Difficult to monitor quality of care. ◆